

Trail Blazing Procedure Introduction

Blazing is a system of marking a trail so that the route is clear to the hiker. Blazing must be done in manner that is easily understood and uniform throughout the trail system. The Bedford Trails Committee has adopted use of a small aluminum disk for marking a trail that is embossed with an arrow to indicate the intended direction of travel. These disks are available in different background colors to distinguish different types of trails. Blue is used to designate the main trail in an area, yellow for an access route and orange for other maintained pathways, including spurs and loops off the main trail. The disk has two holes for mounting so that it can be oriented with the arrow up to direct a hiker straight-ahead, or rotated to indicate the direction of a turn. The blaze at the end of a trail is oriented with the arrow facing down. This is done at a trailhead to indicate that the trail does not continue and at an intersection with another trail to indicate the end of a spur or loop.

This is an instructional procedure for blazing using the disks described above. It covers general guidelines for blazing trails, identifies the materials used and disk installation.
General Blazing Guidelines

Obtain a map of the area that shows the route of the trail to be blazed. Existing blazes may be followed as a guide. Any new routes should be clearly marked, e.g. with surveyors tape, preferably with the proper color for the trail designation.

Blazes should be well placed for visibility and located to 'strike the eye' when sighted ahead from the trail. Blazing height should be about eye level, about 6 feet, but this can vary depending on line-of-sight visibility.

The frequency or spacing of blazes along a route is primarily determined by the character of the trail and not by any fixed rule. Over blazing is unsightly, unnecessary and less interesting to the hiker. Each direction of a trail has its own character or 'feel', therefore blazing should be done only in one direction at a time. Trail feel will strongly influence both blaze location and spacing. When uncertain blaze less often since an additional blaze can always be added or an installed blaze relocated. For example, on a narrow woodland trail with an obvious corridor and no intersections blazes can be quite widely spaced, possibly separated by a few hundred feet. In contrast, a trail through open woods, without an obvious treadway, or with intersecting pathways may need to be more closely blazed.

When a spur or loop ends or a secondary trail crosses a main trail, a main trail blaze should be visible in both directions from the intersection. A supplementary blaze should also be placed to indicate the direction of travel anywhere a potentially confusing turn or alternate pathway exists and after a turn to confirm the intended route. A blaze should ALWAYS be placed so that it is visible along the direction of travel, i.e. as seen by an approaching hiker looking ahead along the trail. Select a larger healthy tree to blaze rather than a smaller one and not a dead one. Blazing the opposite sides of the same tree is not good practice because if that tree falls both blazes will be lost.

After blazing is completed hike the route to determine if blazing is satisfactory. This is best done with or by someone else not as familiar with the trail that can provide an honest critique. Note any blazes whose visibility is blocked by vegetation. Remember, the job's not finished until all surveyors' tape and all unused existing markers are removed and old painted blazes are obscured.

Materials

1. Trail map
2. Disks (blue, orange, yellow)
3. Nails (7d galvanized box)
4. Claw hammer
5. Spray paint (if old painted blazes are to be obscured)

Disk Installation

Disk installation is essentially a three-step process. The first step is to locate the disk with good visibility from the trail. The second is to orient the disk so that it indicates the trail direction beyond. The third is simply to mount the blaze. This procedure is best accomplished by a two-person team, identified as Blazer and Support.

1. Identify the trail to blaze and gather the material needed.
2. The Support carries a supply of disks and nails. A small back pack is suggested to carry this material.
3. The Blazer carries the hammer and will mount the disk.
4. Both team members stand in the trail and look ahead to select a tree and mounting location that is will 'strike the eye'.
5. The Support hands the Blazer a disk (of the proper color) and some nails.

6. The Blazer alone moves to the selected tree and temporarily places the disk so that the Support can visually confirm it will be properly located and oriented.

7. After confirmation, the Blazer mounts the disk using two nails, leaving about 1" under the blaze for future tree growth.

8. The Blazer is joined by the Support and steps 4 - 7 are repeated for the next and for subsequent disks.

9. After blazing in one direction retrace the route to review the work done and relocate, add, remove, reposition disks as necessary. This can be done at a later time.

10. Finally, obscure any old painted blazes and remove all unwanted nailed markers. This too can be done at a later time. However, if the remaining old blazes are not the same color as the disks they should be obscured as soon as possible to avoid confusion.

Points to Remember

- * Blaze with a two person team.
- * Locate a disk to 'strike the eye'.
- * Blaze only in one direction at a time.
- * Place only one disk on a tree.
- * Leave sufficient space under the disk for tree growth.
- * Space disks according to the character of the trail.
- * Avoid excessive blazing.
- * Review the blazed route when completed.
- * Obscure/remove existing unwanted blazes.